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THE AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARY as it stands today is a remarkable achievement, indeed, one of the outstanding American contributions to civilization. I know of no department in our national life that exhibits a greater proportion of able and devoted leaders, men and women of outstanding personality whose work will live on beyond them, beneficently. They have laid a broad base for an institution that will have an even greater future when it shall bodily take to itself the leadership in adult education which it alone is capable of developing, and shall make itself over into a people's university, sound bulwark of a democratic state.¹

Thus spake Alvin Johnson in 1938. His words fell on the ears of this writer, in the springtime of his professional career, like the words of Henry V to his troops at Harfleur. Here was our mandate, not pronounced by a librarian but by one of the most distinguished educators and social scientists of his day.

Johnson, after a careful study of many leading public libraries, based his conclusion on four factors peculiar to his subject: (1) it has the control of the supply of books, the main source of learning; (2) its patrons come to it voluntarily—an essential aspect of adult education; (3) it is remarkably free from censorship, dedicated to presenting all sides of debatable questions; and (4) it is in a position to reach a larger proportion of the population of a city than any other institution except the public schools. (This exception, as most public library registration figures would confirm, was not necessary.)

Johnson was not alone in this opinion. Fourteen years earlier, Learned had written that, if fully organized as an "active intelligence center" and "if duplicated from city to city and organized on a regional or county basis for rural or semi-urban districts, it would im-

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mediately take its place as the chief instrument of our common intellectual and cultural progress.”² Morse Cartwright,³ long time Director of the American Association for Adult Education, Lyman Bryson,⁴ Head of the Adult Education Department of Teacher’s College, and later Cyril Houle⁵ of the University of Chicago, all non-librarians have spoken in a similar vein. Why have we not achieved more? Why has the public library, in the intervening years, not achieved this position of leadership? It cannot be said that the reasoning is faulty because the concept has never been fully tested. The most likely explanation is that the challenge has never been accepted by top library management and the necessary organizational structure has not developed.

Because I had recently been appointed to the American Library Association Board on the Library and Adult Education, it was my privilege to attend the notable “Princeton Conference” which was called by the American Association for Adult Education in January, 1939, to discuss Johnson’s findings. In attendance were the acknowledged leaders of the American public library: the administrative heads of most of the largest systems plus such leaders in the library-adult education movement as Mary U. Rothrock, Miriam Tompkins, Jennie M. Flexner, John Chancellor and Carl Milam. Also present were Alvin Johnson himself, officials of the Association and, as principal host, Frederick P. Keppel, President of the Carnegie Corporation of New York. For two days the discussion was lively and sometimes heated. No full account of the proceedings was kept but the following is an excerpt from the brief report of the Secretary:

A divergence of opinion, ranging from a strong belief in non-participation in the leadership of community-wide adult education to an equally strong belief that the library should undertake active leadership became apparent. It was stated (1) that if the library attempts to mold opinion by supplying leadership for groups, it will have to discontinue many of the services it is now rendering; (2) that the library should serve only as an auxiliary to all other agencies in the community; (3) that in the adult education of the community the librarian can be much more effective as adjutant than as general; (4) that it is the librarian’s job to supply tools to make possible efficient school work, club work, etc., and not to supply leadership; (5) that it is not feasible for the public library at the present time to stimulate further demands on the book supply and library staffs by undertaking leadership of groups when there are already insuffi-

cient reading materials and inadequate staffs to meet today's demands; (6) that the library's policy must remain elastic; it must be ready to take over activities that other organizations are unable to attempt or to carry on and also to give over leadership of activities to other organizations as soon as they are ready to assume it; (7) that librarians must take the initiative in organizing community activities relating to the library's special interest—the book.⁶

The varying opinions are not identified but I can testify from memory that the lines were sharply drawn between library administrators and non-administrators. One of the most vocal of those present has continued to oppose this role of community leadership up to the present time. His view is that we must not spread ourselves too thin, that we cannot do a good job of what Johnson called "pure librarianship" if we give our "time and attention to acting as community leaders of adult group thinking, talking, dramatics, and other activities."⁷ These phrases do not, of course, describe the total job of leadership but they represent Wheeler's view of the question. It is significant that when Wheeler left the Enoch Pratt Free Library, his successor, Emerson Greenaway, together with the team of Amy Winslow and Marion Hawes, went farther than perhaps any other major library in approaching the goal of leadership recommended by Johnson.⁸

Of the obstacles to leadership which Johnson cited, the first was "the rather touching modesty of librarians themselves, immolated to the ideal of standing in an ancillary position to an abstraction . . . the assumed desires of the public."⁹ I would venture the opinion that caution, rather than modesty, is a better word to describe the attitude, coupled with a realization of the hugeness of the responsibility.

Another reason for the failure of Johnson's ideas to take hold was the lack of specifics on how the job should be done. He offered no blueprints or organization charts. Although he praised the work done by the reader's advisers to which the major efforts of library-adult educators had been directed during the nineteen-thirties, he did make one significant point which has often been overlooked in the discussions of his views. He stated:

But today as in the early nineteenth century it is the rare individual who can carry his adult educational course through solitary reading. He may provide himself with the finest list of books on a subject he knows to be important, and may start on it with the most deliberate resolutions. He will probably fall by the wayside. Per-

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sonal contacts, the clash of mind on mind, are necessary, in the great majority of cases, for persistent educational reading.¹⁰

It was up to those who did accept his challenge to develop a plan and an organization. To a considerable extent the development of group services has been the answer.

In 1941 an opportunity to organize for extensive advisory services to groups was presented in the Cleveland Public Library. An "Appraisal Study"¹¹ had recently been completed by Leon Carnovsky, assisted by Amy Winslow and, to a minor degree, by this writer. Among its recommendations was one for the establishment of an adult education department. It was decided to implement this recommendation and the responsibility for organizing and supervising the department fell to me. The pattern which was adopted, though new then, has since been recognized as sound and followed successfully in a number of other libraries.

Carnovsky and his staff were well aware of the dangers of compartmentalizing the work relating to adult education. They wanted to avoid a situation in which the rest of the library staff could feel relieved of the responsibility for the total program. To avoid this hazard the department was set up with functional relationships to other departments. The organization chart showed dotted lines extending from the department to the Main Library divisions and branch libraries, in contrast to the solid lines which indicated direct administrative authority. The department could advise and recommend action by these entities; it could not command. Obviously, the success of the program depended on the extent to which the Adult Education Department could secure the active cooperation of the line departments in carrying out its objectives.

The staff was composed of the supervisor (more recently the title of "coordinator" has been considered more appropriate), two "field workers" (now known as group advisers), the curator of the film service which was established at the same time, other assistants in the film bureau and a secretary. It was given full departmental status.

It was recognized from the beginning that group activities would be of two kinds: library-sponsored programs and advisory services to existing community organizations. Although the library-sponsored meetings taking place at the Main Library could be organized and conducted by the department itself, those taking place in the branches required the full participation and support of the branch librarians,

not to mention the Branch Department. At the beginning this was not easy, although somewhat later extensive programs of Great Books and World Politics were organized and conducted by the branches with the assistance of the Adult Education Department staff. To a greater or lesser degree this has continued, with a variety of programs. Two outstanding later projects, work with the under-educated and with the aging, are still in operation. One of them is described by Fern Long in this issue.

The concept of field workers or group advisers was based on the knowledge that there are hundreds of existing, organized groups in any community, each one with a number of loyal members and all engaging, whether they call it that or not, in some form of adult education. They meet regularly, hear speakers, look at films or discuss topics of common interest. They usually have program chairmen who, with little or no experience in the job, struggle to come up with a series of programs to get them through the year. It was thought that, by applying the techniques of the reader's adviser, these group leaders could be interviewed and suggestions made in accordance with their needs. Various forms of program could be recommended, such as panel discussions, symposia, film forums, and suggestions could be made towards good discussion methods. Subjects of more significance than would otherwise have been chosen, could be urged. A speakers' bureau could be maintained containing names of qualified people willing to appear before such groups free or for a small fee. Reading lists could be made, book exhibits offered and, wherever possible, books and other printed materials should be related to the activities. If highly qualified educator-librarians could apply their skills and knowledge to raising the standards and performance of hundreds of groups throughout the community, this would be a major contribution to adult education. Although it would not be exactly what Alvin Johnson had in mind, it would be real leadership.

This was what was done and, to the extent to which the program has been implemented by qualified staff, it has been successful. Actually the staff has been reduced rather than increased over the years. It is interesting to speculate on what might have resulted from a dynamic outreaching to all groups in the community with a large, specialized staff of skilled group advisers.

One device, used here and elsewhere, is the program planning institute. This has been particularly successful where groups are federated, as in the case of the Federation of Women's Clubs or the Parent

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Teacher Associations or church councils. With the cooperation of the central body, unit program chairmen are called together and much information and assistance offered on a mass basis. A case study of this type of program is included in this issue.

Whether she is advising individual groups, or groups of groups in a program planning institute, the group adviser has a unique advantage. She has experience, she is presumably well read, she has a knowledge of community organization and group discussion methods. Because she consults with a variety of groups she is in a position to pick up good program ideas and pass them on to others. She can also warn against poor ideas. Her office is at the cross-roads of thinking in the community, while at the same time it is situated in what Learned called the community "intelligence center,"¹² the library. She is in a position to effect a cross-fertilization of ideas, and, to change the metaphor, to be a catalyst for their development.

An important element which appeared on the horizon of adult education at the time of the formation of the Cleveland project was the educational film. The beginnings of the Cleveland Film Bureau have been described elsewhere.¹³ It was established in September, 1942, as a section of the Adult Education Department. The question of why there, rather than elsewhere in the library, is best answered by stating that the film is primarily a group medium and, since its utilization is involved directly in program planning, this seemed the most appropriate place. Although later film collections, such as those of the Detroit and Cincinnati public libraries, were established as parts of their audio-visual departments along with recordings and other non-book materials, in my opinion Cleveland's original decision was correct. Experience in Akron, Seattle and other libraries seems to bear out the fact that the medium can be integrated better with the total program if organized by function rather than by form. Of course, if no sharply focused group service agency exists in the library structure, other arrangements must be made. The film can be a potent ally in any group service department because it attracts many program planners who otherwise would not come for assistance. As in the case of program planning institutes, film utilization institutes, involving church, club and social agency groups, have constituted excellent means by which the library can exercise educational leadership. Films also add greatly to the resources with which a group adviser has to work and are most valuable in planning library-sponsored programs.

According to Robert Ellis Lee,

The educational role of the library during the late 1950's and early 1960's was based on the philosophy of integrating the library with the community it served. It involved a thorough knowledge of the importance as well as the educational benefits of working with community groups and organizations; of understanding the objectives, interests and activities of community groups; of participating in the planning of community activities; and of helping the library to become a more active force in the community.¹⁴

A number of surveys have been made and articles written which bear this out, but there is very little in the literature dealing with the organization of such activities. Many of the largest libraries have designated an Adult Services Coordinator to give over-all supervision and encouragement to the library's adult education program. There seems to be a stronger trend in this direction than toward the type of group service department described above. However, Fern Long, who has directed the Cleveland Adult Education Department since 1944 writes:

There have been times when I have compared our organizational pattern unfavorably with that of other large libraries which have instituted Adult Service Departments much more comprehensive than our Adult Education Department. However, lately I have returned to believing that our organizational pattern is not too bad. It has given us the opportunity to concentrate on experimental areas in a way that would not have been possible had we been tied to intricate administrative responsibilities.¹⁵

Although the bulk of our work will always be with individuals, we must, if we are to exercise general leadership in adult education, become group-oriented in every direction. The chief librarian should be in close touch with, and where possible, an active participant in, the work of the major organizations in the community—the planning commission, the welfare federation, the Chamber of Commerce, the Urban League, as well as labor leaders and school and university authorities. He should seek out every opportunity to call attention to the varied functions of the library and the ways in which it can be helpful. Similarly, the head of the adult education agency of the library and her staff will become involved on a somewhat lower level of the community organizational structure. Other professional staff, in the reference, circulation and children's services can also play their parts. The branches should be group-oriented on a neighborhood basis and

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should be willing to call on the group service department not only for guidance but for tangible assistance.

In smaller libraries, where departmentalization is limited, these functions will be carried by the chief librarian with assistance from the staff in accordance with their talents and training. It is hoped that, as smaller libraries become integrated with larger systems, specialized group advisers will be available.

The chief librarian in a large system has two other responsibilities in this connection: (1) to secure adequate financial backing for group services, and (2) to give it his moral support in time of need. To those branch librarians who may be dedicated to the concept of "pure librarianship" it can be pointed out that a reasonable number of group activities for adults is just as essential to a balanced program as it is for children. Specialists in the main library should be encouraged by the administrators to cooperate in giving book reviews or talks when requested. The whole staff should be continually reminded of the educational objectives of the library and the means by which they can be attained.

Next to adequate funding and strong administrative support, the greatest need in developing a strong group service program is for highly motivated and qualified staff. It is probably because there is such little demand for training either from administrators or from candidates that this is such a minor aspect of library education. Can we expect some conviction and leadership from library schools in this area? As Johnson recognized thirty years ago, "Most librarians . . . have been educated to regard themselves as custodians and administrators of books . . . whether or not educational and educationally employed."¹⁶ Where guidance techniques are taught they still apply largely to individuals—except in work with children. The education of children's librarians has always included training in effective methods of working with groups, and this training has never been questioned. The paucity of similar courses for adult group services constitutes a real handicap in the development of this work.

In 1943 the *Post-war Standards for Public Libraries* stated that "The public library should have a positive program of stimulation and leadership suited to the needs of our time."¹⁷ In the subsequent editions of the *Standards* however, the word "leadership" is missing from the statements on objectives. Perhaps there is no relationship between leadership and group services, in which case this paper is based on a

false premise. Yet this writer has long believed that failure to accept this relationship has led to faltering leadership in adult education.

In a recent article Emerson Greenaway points out that:

Public libraries have a great future in the field of adult services because time, money, and resources formerly channeled for work with students will be partially available to meet the needs of the adult population. The great infusion of federal funds for schools and colleges will make it possible to divert attention to the demands of informal continuing education.¹⁸

In our planning for this future it is hoped that provisions will be made for strong group service agencies. Working with citizen groups on all levels will go a long way toward achieving a position of leadership in the community which has so far escaped us. If we are to lead in the area of informal continuing education we must organize for it and see that talented and trained librarians are available to staff it. Those who urged that librarians be leaders rather than the servants of education based their opinions on the nature of our institution. The fact that we have not realized their hopes does not necessarily show that they were wrong. Rather, it suggests that as librarians we have not come up to their expectations. Perhaps, as Greenaway suggests, we are being offered another chance.

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